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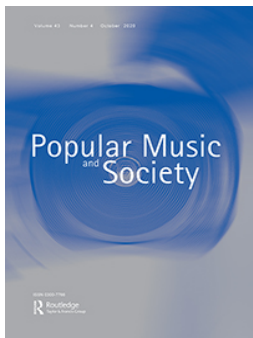
de Paor-Evans, Adam ORCID: 0000-0003-4797-7495 (2020) Urban Myths and Rural Legends: An Alternate Take on the Regionalism of Hip Hop. Popular Music and Society, 44 (3). ISSN 0300-7766

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2020.1730651>

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To cite this article: Adam de Paor-Evans (2020) Urban Myths and Rural Legends: An Alternate Take on the Regionalism of Hip Hop, Popular Music and Society, 43:4, 414-425, DOI: [10.1080/03007766.2020.1730651](https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2020.1730651)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2020.1730651>



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Published online: 24 Feb 2020.



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Urban Myths and Rural Legends: An Alternate Take on the Regionalism of Hip Hop

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ABSTRACT

The practices of hip-hop evolved during the mid-1970s in New York City's dilapidated neighborhoods and are almost exclusively represented through the fabric of inner-city life. However, over the past forty years hip-hop has produced diverse regional-rural agendas within the core elements of the culture, reflected in its sound. By exploring hip-hop culture in the West Country, UK, this article locates hip-hop's regional-rural origins to attest its productions evolve differently to that of metro-centric artists, coexisting as vehicles for negotiating socio-geographical acceptance and affirming a regional-rural identity. These alternate modes of practice enrich the wider hip-hop community by developing relationships with traditional regional culture and producing new narratives to challenge hip-hop's conventions.

KEYWORDS

Authenticity; britcore; British rap; hip-hop; regionalism; ruralism

It is commonly accepted that hip-hop culture originated during the early 1970s among the destitute projects of New York City (Berman 15; Chang 17). Growing from economic, political, and socio-spatial oppression and displacement largely due to Robert Moses's mass build housing program initiated during the 1930s, the origins of hip hop are firmly embedded in the ground of this urbanism (Evans 187). Hip-hop's heritage is also rooted in African-American, Jamaican, and Latinx diasporas which fueled its pioneering creative and cultural drive. Hip hop draws upon transglobal influences that "motivates youth internationally to explore their own issues of marginalization in the hip-hop underground" (Osumare 172). Global hip hop transits into glocalised hip-hop as it engenders national, regional, and local traditions and rituals. To date, locational studies that explicitly deal with regional-rural hip hop are limited,¹ although Minestrelli's work on Australian Indigenous hip hop richly delves into the intertwined relationships between First Nations, music, and the land. Minestrelli explores these artists as: "*bricoleurs* whose artistic work reflects their composite life experiences" (Minestrelli 5). Regional-rural pockets omit the intensity of speed and esthetic experienced in the metropolis and catalyze an alternative bricolage of hip-hop practice. It is these less chartered terrains that frame this article.

By locating the West Country of the UK's regional-rural hip-hop origins, this article explores a three-fold inquiry. Firstly, it will reveal the transitional practices of hip hop in the West Country as its champions shifted from consumers to producers. Secondly, it will interrogate the cultural issues that regional practitioners encountered in the broader

sphere of hip hop in terms of accent, dialectal, and geographical distancing. Lastly, it explores semantics and narratives within the language of West Country rap as it engages with both localized and transnational audiences. This inquiry is undertaken through literature review and a mixed methodology of artifact and sonic analysis, and reflexive autoethnography alongside semi-structured interviews with regional artists Specifik, Si Spex, Big Tunes D, Verbal Wurzels/Lowercase, and Jackie Chat. The article concludes that the production of hip hop in the West Country evolves differently from that of metro-centric artists, and the regional-rural construction of hip-hop coexists as a vehicle for negotiating broader socio-geographical acceptance and affirming a regional identity. As such, these negotiations and alternate modes of practice enrich the wider contemporary hip-hop climate, extending the thoughts of Rakim's lyric: "[It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at](#)"² with celebration and poignancy.

From Urban to Rural

Almost a decade had elapsed since DJ Kool Herc threw the first hip-hop jam at Sedgwick Avenue, the Bronx,³ before the culture arrived in the West Country. Here, like many places across the UK, the video to Malcolm McLaren and the World's Famous Supreme Team's single "Buffalo Gals" mesmerized British youth as it was transmitted into homes during December 1982. The following year raised the question: what is breakdance, and breakdance music? It is necessary here to point out that in 1983 the term "hip hop" was not commonplace in provincial Britain, as either a music genre or a cultural anchor. As Gloucester's Big Tunes D attests, "Funny, we were calling it electro-funk at that time. The term hip hop came later for us; we were always a little behind because of our location" (3). Even London's infamous Groove Records were publishing their "Electro-Funk Chart," rather than a hip-hop chart, and the most significant compilation albums – the Street Sounds Electro series – did not introduce the term into their titles until volume 11 in 1986 ([de Paor-evans](#) 148). Those in the hinterlands of the regional-rural relied on a narrow choice of accessible releases and the sparse number of rap records John Peel would play on his BBC Radio 1 show. The Creators' Cornwall-based Si Spex confirms the significance of Peel's eclectic shows for those in the regional-rural: "Obviously, there was nothing; we were starved of music, so we had to listen to John Peel and he played two tracks a night . . . trying to record and having to sit through hours of Cocteau Twins and Half Man Half Biscuit and crazy thrashy nonsense" ([Si Spex](#)).

While London and other large cities were championing hip-hop performance, these formative times exist largely as memories. As stated by [old.british.hiphop.co.uk](#): "As with so much of hip-hop's early history, as well as what was happening in New York the developing scene in the UK was and remains undocumented. Records weren't really released, it was all about the live show and rocking parties and nobody thought to detail all that was evolving" ("[18](#)").⁴ Yet in regional-rural areas, opportunities for live shows were almost nil due to the sparseness of hip-hop followers and lack of demand for events. Hip-hop music was perceived as alien gimmickry by the broader demographic of the West Country, and rap fans suffered personal and institutional prejudice. An example of the latter's weight can be evidenced in an hourly jingle that proudly boasted: " . . . AND WE DON'T PLAY RAP!" by Exeter's regional radio station Gemini FM. This amplified the personal prejudices of an elder peer group, and Specifik recalls: "They [elders] would

say ‘it’s not music,’ and ‘it’s a fad that won’t be around long’” (*Specifik*). I am reminded of occasions in the park where we would be told angrily to “turn off that rap crap” by elder dog-walkers; hostile comments fueled by the worst in parochialist attitude and a deeply concerning naivete about hip hop and its emerging global identity as a black, urban culture threatening a dominantly white, rural way of life. This ostracization further pushed West Country practitioners underground where the development of the artifact had more presence than the fluidity of public performance.

From Consumers to Producers

With no critical mass to petition for regular jams, pioneering local artists turned to DIY manufacturing to test their practice. The heavy reliance on products rather than the processes of hip hop meant that the first regional-rural practitioners learnt their practice by undertaking detailed analysis and an almost forensic unpacking of hip-hop’s reifications. Record sleeves, label designs, and cassette packaging were paramount to their understanding of hip hop. Through these secondary forms of representation, hip hop acquired meaning which was born out of both localized consumption and production. The records that these first-generation regional-rural hip-hop adopters breakdanced to were visually, sonically, and lyrically laden with tropes, symbols, and representations of the urban. Regional-rural consumers were exposed to the notion of “city” as well as “street.” City Street Records, Alex and the City Crew, and even London’s City Limits Crew adorned record sleeves alongside a superfluous number of compilation albums such as *Breakdance Fever*, *Street Beats*, and *Genius of Rap*, all of which drew on the highly engaging visuals of urban graffiti to excite consumers.

The mobility of these recorded artifacts carried the myth of the urban to the country, a myth upon which the first biographies of regional-rural hip-hop practitioners was built. With only these visual reference points, regional-rural dwellers assumed the urban fabric as a singular hip-hop context, which although unknowingly self-limiting, was hugely significant in grounding their embryonic practice. *Farrugia* discusses the significance of mobilities of cultural capital created in cities to youth dwelling in rural areas “As flows of capital are accumulated and agglomerated in cities, the relationship between the city and the country has been reshaped such that many rural young people are unable to access the resources they require to build biographies” (838). The limitations of regional-rural dwellers in accessing a wider breadth of hip-hop culture during its early years meant that they needed to buy into these narrower scopes of representation. Through this restricted consumption of hip-hop culture, a new habitus evolved which initially drew upon the ideology of hip-hop in American urban life but was later reimagined and practiced in the sphere of the regional-rural.

In response to *Bourdieu*’s habitus, the primary system which classifies practices and ultimately taste (167), is the structure of the regional-rural practices associated with convention and tradition in the West Country; there is inherently a social placing of these practices and their correlating artifacts, which in turn relate to taste, and ultimately class.⁵ To then examine the habitus of the regional-rural hip-hop practitioner in a similar way, the aforementioned hip-hop tropes aid a framing of habitus, but the imagined urbanism projected by hip-hop’s reifications influence the construction of the regional-rural habitus. These reifications become the correlating artifacts of the habitus, and when coupled with direct regional-rural hip-hop praxis, the habitus of the regional-rural hip-

hop practitioner abridges imagined urban experience, engagement with secondary artifacts, and primary regional-rural practice. In turn, this new hip-hop habitus evolves through responding to its local regional-rural traditions and the continuing development of glocal hip-hop culture. Furthermore, there is an invisible class system at play between regional-rural dwellers and inhabitants of cities, constructed through what Farrugia describes as “structural inequalities that differentiate rural and urban places” (842). These structural inequalities, cultivated through lack of access to hip-hop sources and primary experience of high urbanism, resulted in the habitus of West Country hip-hop differing greatly from those of its urban counterpart. What is critical here, is that throughout the lifespan of West Country hip hop, the anchor of its habitus shifted from urban ideologies to everyday regional-rural practices.

Bourdieu affirms that “Each class condition is defined simultaneously, by its intrinsic properties and by the relational properties which it derives from its position in the system of class conditions” (166–67). He continues to explain the distinction of class systems are based on everything they are opposed to, and that: “social identity is defined and asserted through difference” (167). The West Country hip-hop habitus reexamined the class conditions in its environment, firstly through the lens of artifacts embedded with urban ideologies, and secondly through the lens of its own emerging regional-rural hip-hop practice. Over the course of three decades, the habitus of West Country hip hop, although historically anchored by the myth of urban life and everyday regional-rural practices, formed its own biography via the modes of production that distinguished itself from local traditions and rituals and from urban ideologies. These modes of production – from the invisible processes of accent and dialect to the tangible recorded DIY artifact – are explored in the remainder of this article.

The Processes of DIY Cultural Capital

Bourdieu places the cultural capital of society in three categories: the institutional (74–75), the objectified (69, 172), and the embodied (70). My interpretation here is that the institutional capital represents the capital of conventional marked achievement, of qualifications and certificates. The objectified is the capital of the material object, artifact or thing, and the embodied, is the cultural capital of one’s thoughts, disposition of mind and actions, and their inherent amassing over time. These versions of cultural capital are variably intertwined, and provide representations about individuals and groups, depending on ownership, acquisition, and collection. If the ideas of manufacture and the processes of production are explored within the field of West Country hip hop, it is possible to discover a greater value to the tactics of production of the early hip-hop pioneers – particularly when the processes themselves are understood as both cultural capital gain and a response to/development of habitus.

The embryonic productions of West Country rap were manufactured by hand. Sleeve designs were produced by the crafting technology of Letraset and cutouts of photographs, mocked-up on handmade cassette templates and photocopied (Figure 1). In the formative, underground years of self-production between 1986 and 1988, audio was recorded directly onto each cassette, as manufacture runs were as short as ten units and circulated only to members of one’s crew or close friends. As external interest and artists’ confidence and experience grew, release runs extended up to 100 units, as in the case of my

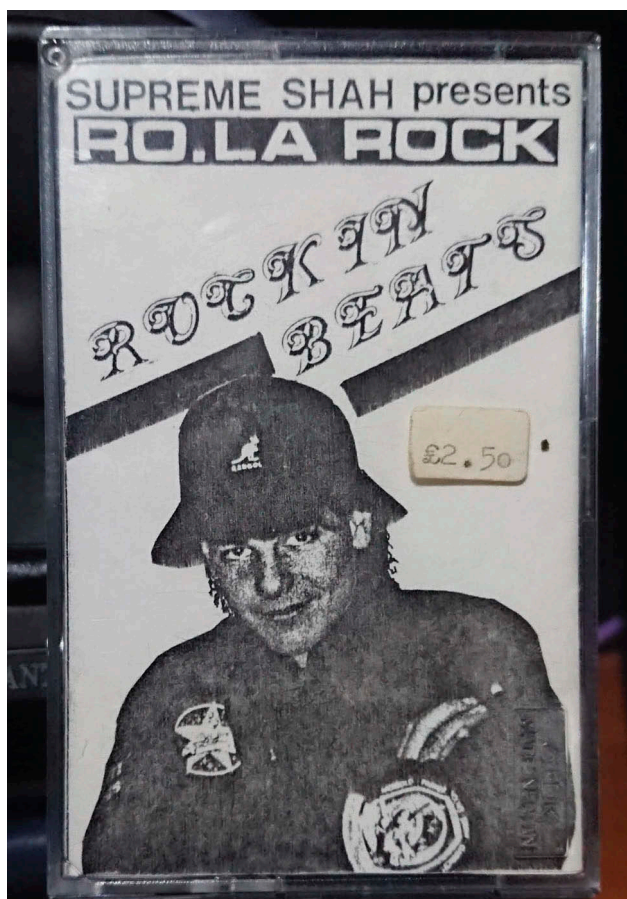


Figure 1. *Rockin Beats* by Ro.La Rock, Cassette, 1988: Photograph courtesy of Rola.

crew – Def Defiance – and our *Hazardous* cassette album of 1992. Copies were earmarked to be sent to London-based record labels as well as radio DJs Westwood (Capital Rap Show) and Max and Dave (KISS-FM). The remainder were sold or given away across Devon, yet through bootlegged tapes the album was circulated as far afield as Switzerland, Austria, and Germany, although this was not known until the mid-noughties and the creation of a Def Defiance myspace page. This was a revelation, not only in illustrating Def Defiance’s reach which had previously been considered localized and provincial, but also in illustrating acceptance by an international audience when London labels and radio jocks had rejected it. Furthermore, a kind of legendary status had been attached to Def Defiance, spawned by the mystery behind the artifacts. Additionally, the happy accident which kept *Hazardous* from receiving an official timely release also deferred the music from potential “product makers” (Rose 143). Cassettes of this kind documented history locally, and sixth and seventh generation dubs that existed in Europe were drastically deteriorated in sound quality and devoid of inlay cards. Yet while this removed much of the esthetic and feel of local context, it is testament to the longevity and global appeal of the music as Berlin’s Rawman attests upon hearing Def Defiance mp3s on the web: “I’d

never heard of them, but one day around 2006–2007, the time of myspace, I discovered these and it was like birthday and Christmas on one day together.”

Although these DIY production techniques are not exclusive to either hip hop or remotely located artistry, they are significant in informing the histories and biographies of West Country hip hop. The opportunity for lo-fi DIY hip-hop production in the West Country was instrumentally fueled by Tandy, a nationwide electronics store where entry-level drum machines, synthesizers, and mixing consoles were reasonably priced, locally available, and not outside the scope of a few weeks savings from a weekend job. Tandy capitalized on the idea of the bedroom producer, and this “digital revolution and its impact on the nature of the recording process” (Peterson and Bennett 5) also enhanced the potential of its producers, breeding confidence in regional-rural DIY practice. Due to the remoteness and disconnection to city life, much time spent on hip hop took place in self-constructed bedroom studios, resulting in an emphasis of the manufacture of DIY artifacts over performance. This suggests a mode of practice which by-passes the traditional performativity of hip hop. In fact, the performance becomes the making of and the subsequent display of the artifact. This tactic ensured a form of damage-limitation, where the performance becomes a historical document prior to its existence in any form of public realm.

Check the Dialect

Why is accent and dialect paramount to the production of West Country hip hop? Przybylski proposes that “Authenticity can be understood as a socially agreed upon quality by which a person or group demonstrates veracity to some valued entity, such as a place or experience” (493), and I would equally propose that the valued entities in West Country hip hop are driven by vocal representations. Artists from disparate regional-rural locations are confronted with a challenge in how they control their vocals, and in how they speak to their own vernacular and the acquired argot of hip hop. This relates to what is arguably the most critical aspect of rap music that creates distance from other music genres – the notion of “keeping it real” associated with ideas of authenticity and identity. Rappers are expected to keep true to their cultural origins and hip hop’s cultural origins to retain a sense of reality depicted within their narrative. It is this realness, once portrayed through the actions of their practice – their narrative habitus contained within their songs – compared to their actual habitus, that affirms or denies their status as “real.”

In the formative years, West Country practices (and most across Britain) attempted to emulate those of America, particularly by rappers through the adoption of fake American accents and tropes, which nonsensically conflicted with hip hop’s core value.⁶ As the notion of fake accents in rap became unacceptable, rappers who acquired either American or London accents (whilst having no connection to either place) were rejected as toys.⁷ So, where did that leave the West Country’s striving artists? By the close of the 1980s a sense of localism began to present itself through an interplay between language, dialect, and accent. I would attribute this rise in localist attitude to two interrelated factors: First, the technical ability in the West Country had advanced to a level which was perceived to be comparable to London artists, and confidence grew in homegrown talent. Second, practitioners gained a reflective understanding of their own cultural terrains and

politics of identity revealed through local vernacular as they tested themselves against their London-centric counterparts.

Speers sketches out that hip hop's authenticity is validated when "it has been reworked and modified to fit the local site of appropriation" (24); however, there remains a risk that hip hop can be modified to suit a new context with the simplest application of a local vernacular. In proposing a new concept for hip hop's authenticity, Speers observes a difference between authenticity of hip hop as community and the authenticity of rappers whereby, "Hip-hop authenticity is based on the genre as a community and its perceived 'rules'" (118), and, "Rapper authenticity is based on individuality and originality and even rebelling to a certain degree" (118). These notions of authenticity are both intertwined and dialectical, and in terms of West Country hip hop the shift in perception from the myth of the urban to the reality of the regional-rural carried great impact on the local hip-hop community. Cramer and Hallet discuss regional identities within Midwestern and Southern States, hypothesizing on how figurative reference points are linked to regional hip-hop identities: "By indexing non-coastal references specific to their respective regions, we suggest that Midwestern and Southern rappers create locally relevant hip hop that exemplifies regional authenticity" (263), and Bennett attests that a process of reconciliation occurs as British hip-hop practitioners attempt to unify: "... issues of musical and stylistic authenticity with those of locality, identity and everyday life" (138). Similar approaches are taken by British West Country artists; however, here the accent and dialect become the issues and the figure. Intertextual play on accent and dialect inherently become the artifacts in rapper's narratives.

The idea that hip hop could be regional occurred through an intrinsic sense of distancing and nearness. Distancing in the wide and heterogeneous gap between the West Country, London, and New York geographic and demographic contexts, and nearness related to the traditions and conventions of cultural practice and identity. In the formative years, West Country rappers were ostensibly at odds with their voice, caught in a chasm between the established delivery of American rap and the tones of London's rising britcore vibe. During the last two years of the 1980s, the rise of London-based artists such as London Posse and Hardnoise claimed a new territory in hip-hop's terrain; and an identity constructed through dialectic fusions of first- and second-generation immigrants' accents with London dialect and cockney slang (Wood 180). Lindholm suggests that "[t]he flattering image of performers as deities of spontaneity and authenticity" is also at risk of being internalized by the artists themselves (37). Regarding this as an attribute of constructed antiestablishment mentality, he continues to explain the playing out of a countercultural identity "is increased by a central tension in the romantic image of performative authenticity" (37). Kajikawa enforces this simply: "rap musicians and fans ascribe great value to authentic expression" (6). Despite many early Devonian recordings attesting to this striving for authenticity, the harnessing of West Country dialect is evident, which began to negate the internalization of the mythical authentic urban rapper.

To those outside the West Country, these voices may sound similar to a Bristolian accent, yet distinctions exist and are emphasized through lyrical content which intentionally rejects the mobility of the urban in favor of reimagining the rural.⁸ A robust example of urban negation in lyrics can be observed on Defiance's 1990 song "Music Fusion," where the typical characteristics of Devonian speech become evident.⁹ A slowness of rhythm coupled by lengthening of vowel sounds typify the Devon accent,

and tentatively begin to reveal themselves in lyrics such as: "... my voice makes moist as I pass the hoist ..." (phonetically: "... moy voyse makes moyst as oi paass the hoyst ...") and, "... better and faster than a mad cow know how ..." (phonetically: "... better and faaaster than a maad caaw know haaw ...").¹⁰ Concurrently, the raps take a lead from Big Daddy Kane and Blade; drawing upon urban America and Britain and fused with Devon twang demonstrates the beginnings of a distinct West Country critical regionalism. Powell proposes a shift in how we consider critical regionalism: it should no longer be of place vis-à-vis placelessness, but, "to discern the local – its history, its politics" (69), and how that converses with wider issues. Work of this nature provided the foundation for the West Country's progression of hip hop, championed by the *Hazardous* album and new millennium artists Verbal Wurzels/Lowercase, and Jackie Chat.

Somerset's Verbal Wurzels/Lowercase deliver exquisite repartee and clearly operate in celebration of their West Country roots.¹¹ Discussing rap's relationship with place, Forman writes that "the emphasis is on place, and groups explicitly advertise their home environments with names such as Compton's Most Wanted" (68). The Verbal Wurzels also celebrate place, playing on the cross-cultural motif of the famous folk-pop crossover comedic band, the Wurzels.¹² The assonance contained within "verbal" and "wuzel" immediately lends itself to hip-hop wordplay, and Samuel Otis and Roscoe Rockwell developed sophisticated rap styles by exaggerating their West Country accents, placing emphasis on rhyming vernacular touchstones, revealing the regionality of West Country hip hop. Lyrics such as "the eloquent pelican with the sharpest beak in Wellington" and, "The extraverted perverted worded/The Verbal Wurzels be remaining rappers hurting" forged their lyrical skill base with a humorous twist. Roscoe proclaims, "to hear me it's a novelty, honestly follow me, influenced by comedy" ("[Take the Rough with the Smooth](#)"). However, the tinge of humor is not included merely to enhance their badinage but as a form of personal defense. Otis states, "One of the problems is when you've got the West Country accent, you end up taking the piss out of yourself – which is shit, really." He furthers the notion of the accent in terms of presence and performance:

The audience, fuck me, they picked up on our accents – they liked it. Hip hop was less homogenized back then. I bring the banter, and I still do that now in live gigs with my band, oorright boooooo, ha-ha. Locally, people can relate to that, it depends where you're playing.

The banter that Otis describes emerges through their hyperbolic accent and exaggerated stage presence. Through a kind of damage limitation, the village idiots avoid direct criticism and confrontation, and instead attract sympathy from harsher urban audiences. This is clearly apparent in "[Girly](#)," where Otis raps a self-deprecating lament about failing abysmally to court a woman. Otis apologetically justifies his lifestyle over a satirically melodic Cozy Powell sample¹³: "Alright, I read 'The Star' and I burp, and fart/I also appreciate walks in the park and certain works of art." Otis's fusion of low culture tabloid choice – *The (Daily) Star* – with his potential admiration of high culture – "certain works of art" – displays an attempt to better himself to become attractive to his desired woman. In the previous verse, Otis pontificates that he may have more courting success if he "kicked some Fresh Prince shit,"¹⁴ sarcastically framing his approach in the broader ironies of golden era rap narratives. A further touch of sardonicism is found in Otis's contextualization of hip hop alongside wider genres of music. Hinting at the cultural values placed on rappers vis-à-vis singer-songwriters, Otis raps: "I got, 'nuff

dignity, plenty of integrity/If there's another fella instead of me, let her be/He writes songs and he's got nice hair/I rock raps so I'm not quite there, I'm too cool to care."

Yet, delivered through his brazen West Country accent, and cloaked in a multitude of vocal "lovveerrrr" drops, Otis firmly positions West Country working-class life at the center of this song. The song is a tragicomedy rooted in truth, and is somewhat reminiscent of the plot in Biz Markie's "Just A Friend": "It is a true song. . . . It's pathetic; I was being pathetic. It was from the heart, a true story, that makes it more pathetic" (Otis). Barker and Taylor discuss authenticity as being: "based largely on a semi-autobiographical approach" (335); "Girly" epitomizes the honesty of authenticity in hip hop.

In contrast, Jackie Chat discusses his experiences with local audiences and accent with greater optimism: "I get a lot of positive comments on my accent; people around here really appreciate the fact that I'm me and I'm not jumping on no bandwagons." Jackie Chat has also forged a wider impression on Instagram, generating mixed feedback:

On Instagram there's a page called "Save The Hip-hop Culture" with over 80 thousand followers, and they wanted to quote some of my lyrics. . . . They got loads of views – but a couple of days later they messaged me and said, "We're going to have to take it down," because they couldn't keep up with deleting the negative comments like "what's this stupid accent he's putting on?" he said, "the people can't understand what you're saying." They were hating on it. That's nuts. (Interview)

Jackie remains sanguine about the West Country's future: "I've even had Americans say, 'We love what you're doing,' 'cause a lot of American people love the English accent. . . . As far as the UK goes, people appreciate the fact that I'm me. It's what sets you apart." Jackie Chat's accent also reflects his regional context:

People say Devon folks sound dopey or whatever, but I think, any slang I use I could be in a local old pub, and there'll be old beys at the bar using the same slang.¹⁵ It goes way back. I feel like it's not trying so hard. It's not a trend, It's timeless. Devon slang, our dialect, is timeless. (Interview)

Conclusion: Divergency and Negotiation through Hip Hop

Regional-rural hip-hop in the West Country took almost three decades to craft its own language. It negotiates between established regional-rural vernacular conventions and the younger traditions of hip hop; and each dialectical turn generates a creative response which fuels the progression of regional-rural hip-hop. It refutes the myth of hip hop purely as urban culture, demonstrated in the anti-street lyrics: " . . . appear here ass backward through a bramble patch/Thicker than tree trunks, half as graceful" (Lowercase, "Take the Ruff with the Smooth"), and "Eight out of ten guns 'round here belong to farmers" (Jackie Chat, "Your Land").

Discussing the location of British hip-hop artists with respect to their American peer-group, Wood notes that "such negotiations of influences are often paradoxically accompanied by an implicit sense of the rejection of cultural dominance" (183), yet West Country hip hop does not suffer an inferiority complex; it has become charged by its context. West Country hip hop does not reject its local cultural rituals but envelops them into the hip-hop mind-set, amplifying what Williams refers to as hip-hop's continuity and tradition (141). Local sites of appropriation are reworked to benefit

the regional and individual as rappers draw upon established traditions. Furthermore, this enveloping of the regional-rural again challenges the myth of hip hop as pure urban culture. To this end, it appears that a complementarity is forged: The West Country has begun to accept homegrown hip hop, which must not become a siloed hip-hop culture. Jackie Chat observes, “You can connect right into your roots. You’re not claiming you’re a part of this movement; you’re part of your roots; it’s authentic” (Interview). A pertinent example of this is Jackie’s acknowledgment of the old “beys” in the pub, and his use of the same slang in his lyrics with as much conviction as traditional hip-hop phraseology.

This article has revealed how West Country artists produced an alternative sound and approach to making hip-hop music and was concurrently drawn into local and regional culture rather than kill or replace it. Thus, the result is a sustainable hybrid hip-hop culture, which respects both the state of mind of hip hop and certain positive vernacular attitudes of West Country life. Hip-hop reimaginings of this nature undoubtedly occur in an array of regional-rural contexts, and the potential for cross-related studies of these contexts may ignite a greater discussion that hip-hop culture is desperate for: one which reaches out from the cities to rurality, and by doing so deepens our understanding of hip hop’s potential as an engine for the progression and conservation of broader culture itself.

Notes

1. “Regional-rural” is used to describe the sphere that envelops rurality, its associated villages, hamlets, small provincial towns and cities geo-culturally distanced from the metropoleis.
2. Rakim’s lyric has been quoted by the hip-hop community since its release on “I Know You Got Soul” (1987). Rakim reprised the lyric in 1990 on “In the Ghetto,” and inspired the title of Gilroy’s essay “[It Ain’t Where You’re From, It’s Where You’re At](#)”.
3. This is a common reference point for the birth of hip hop, cited throughout the hip-hop community and scholarship ([Chang](#) 67–85).
4. [old.britishhiphop.co.uk/](#) contains a useful database of UK hip hop’s key stages and artists.
5. For example, the practices of farming and hunting and the distinctive signs of Land Rovers, tweed, cider, fishing rods, scones, and livestock.
6. I was guilty of this myself, proclaiming in 1986, I “never fail to make the crowd say ‘Ho!’ yet I had never played live or asked anyone to yell the call-and-response hip-hop trope, ‘Ho!’”.
7. The term “toy” is widely used in graffiti and hip-hop cultures to denote an inexperienced or fraudulent practitioner.
8. Although Bristol is a major city in the West Country and one of the first UK places to practice graffiti and hip hop, it is still some 166 miles from its center to the far reaches of Cornwall.
9. *Music Fusion*, Def Defiance, self-released and not on label, 1990. Subsequently re-issued as a 12” vinyl EP in 2017 by Berlin label Britcore Rawmance.
10. The “mad cow” relates, first, to the hysteria surrounding the BSE “Mad Cow Disease,” and, second, is a battle-lyric aimed at MC Mad Cow, a rapper from Plymouth, Devon.
11. “Wurzel” is West Country slang for a bumpkin (which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as an unsophisticated person from the countryside).
12. The Wurzels typified the use of West Country tropes and celebration of self-depreciation throughout their songs “I Am A Cider Drinker” and “The Combine Harvester (Brand New Key),” an approach which acts as a point of departure for the Verbal Wurzels’ work. However comically, the Wurzels helped place the West Country on the popular music map, where, as [Webb](#) comments, “Bristol had gone from a relative backwater where most

people felt that The Wurzels and Fred Wedlock were the height of West Country musical production” (79–80).

13. British-born rock drummer Cozy Powell was a member of Rainbow and Black Sabbath and released five solo albums between 1979 and 1992. The sample for “Girly” was sourced from Powell’s “Sweet Poison” (*Over the Top*, 1979).
14. The Fresh Prince is renowned for his light-touch, story-telling antics in his earlier rap ventures. Particularly noteworthy here are “Girls Ain’t Nothing but Trouble” and “Parents (Just Don’t Understand)” in which The Fresh Prince recounts elaborate tales of his teenage encounters with girls.
15. “Beys” or “Bays” is an affectionate term for local, Devonian males, used across generations in the region.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to the interviewees for their insightful discussions: Big Tunes D, Jackie Chat, Samuel Otis, Specifik, Si Spex, and Rawman. Additional thanks to Rola for supplying the photograph of his first self-constructed DIY album.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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